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ABSTRACT

The seventh national plan (1976-80) in France provided for development of indicators describing initial labor market entry and the place of young people in recruitments. The National School-to-Work Transition Observatory was created in response to the desire to have a permanent system of information on youth labor market entry. "Snapshot" surveys describing employment status 9 months after the end of studies were set up in the mid-1970s. At the beginning of the 1980s, the first analyses resulting from the retrospective advancement surveys introduced the longitudinal dimension and brought out the complexity of the transition between initial training and employment. New developments led to the transformation of the observation instrument and the choice of new options. The demand for evaluation changed for these reasons: processes of youth labor market entry were becoming increasingly complex; it became indispensable to study the situation of beginners in the employment systems; and institutional changes affected the scope of vocational training. Among the new options for observing the school-to-work transition, the following were chosen: a focus on young people and the employers; a survey analyzing the paths four years after leaving school, regardless of the level; creation of standard itineraries representing modal paths after training; and double processing of apprenticeship. The mechanism being set up would allow new angles of analysis to be integrated into the previous version. (YLB)

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A FRENCH NEWSLETTER FROM CEREQ AND ITS ASSOCIATED CENTRES

A New Mechanism for Analysing the School-to-Work Transition in France[1]

Céreq's National School-to-Work Transition Observatory (ONEVA) is changing. This statistical operation, created twenty years ago in the context of the seventh Plan (1976-1980), has amply demonstrated the value of a longitudinal analysis of youth labour-market entry. While continuing in the line of the earlier programme, the operation is now adapting to changes in the nature of the school-to-work transition. The shift to a more modular structure and greater emphasis on the role of employers should create new prospects for the use of the observatory.

The Source: French-Style Planning

In the early 1970s, knowing whether the different sectors of the economy would dispose of the skilled workforce necessary for their growth was a major preoccupation for planners [Affichard and Gensbittel 1984]. The preparatory studies for the sixth Plan (1974) attempted to anticipate imbalances between the estimated recruitment needs of companies and the exits from initial training in order to propose a suitable corrective policy. To that end, comparisons were made between projections of medium-term employment and those of educational-system flows. The two series of projections were carried out independently but with a classification system establishing correspondences between training and employment levels: for example, Level V corresponds to the CAP or BEP[2], the first-level diplomas in vocational education, and to skilled workers on the job grid. The purpose of such efforts was to adapt the educational system to the presumed needs of economic growth, implicitly based on a hierarchical representation of the training system and the workplace. The seventh Plan, drawn up between 1975 and 1977, marked a turning point, and the first studies on labour-market entry carried out during its preparation showed the limitations of the previous model. It was discovered that exits from initial training constituted only a minority of labour-force movements in the companies and that the proportion of adult recruitments and internal mobility was fairly large. The link between initial training and employment appeared less systematic than had been presumed until then. It thus seemed indispensable to develop indicators describing initial labour-market entry and the place of young people in recruitments, as well as to create a statistical system describing the school-to-work transition. The first task gave rise to the training-employment balance sheets, socio-demographic breakdowns relating estimated flows of training exits and statistical sources on the labour force and its evolution. The creation of Céreq's National School-to-Work Transition Observatory responded, by contrast, to the desire to have a permanent system of information on youth labour-market entry.

The so-called *snapshot surveys*, describing employment status nine months after the end of studies, were set up in the mid 1970s. This statistical apparatus reflects the main preoccupations of its designers: detailed evaluation of the educational system in order to adapt it to economic development. The snapshot surveys are a tool for centrally orienting the educational system in the short term through the production of economic indicators of short-term occupational activity by training level and specialisation. At the beginning of the 1980s, the system was changed, with the snapshot surveys directed by the DEP (the Ministry of Education's Department of Evaluation and Prospective Analysis), and decentrali-

1. See also *Training and Employment* no. 3 (spring 1991) for related articles on the school-to-work transition and Céreq's EVA observatory.

2. See *Training and Employment* no. 15 Spring 1994 for explanations of the various diplomas.

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sed to meet the needs of regional and local evaluations. At the same time, the first analyses resulting from the retrospective advancement surveys, tracing the work itineraries of young people month by month for three to four years after their exit from school, introduced the longitudinal dimension and permitted the complexity of the transition between initial training and employment to be brought out.

Indeed, these advancement surveys showed that the school-to-work transition is a long, complicated process that cannot be summed up by statistical indicators, and its analysis requires a sufficient period of observation [Viney 1983].

These surveys did not depart from the initial logic, however, namely that of guiding the educational system in a segmented model establishing a prior correspondence between the initial training level of the young people and the expected job level. In fact, they reproduced the structure of the educational system by level--those exiting secondary education, *baccalauréat*-holders and higher-education graduates were queried separately. Their very structure reflected the desire for detailed evaluation of the diplomas: the samples, large scale, were optimised to produce standard career-path indicators by level and detailed training specialisation, with the result that the least frequent specialisations were over-represented.

A whole series of new developments thus led to the transformation of the observation tool and the choice of new options.

Current Debates on Youth Labour-Market Entry in France

• **Processes of youth labour-market entry are becoming increasingly complex**. The existence of numerous measures intended to facilitate the school-to-work transition are contributing to the diversification of possible employment situations. The trade-offs between further education and direct entry into working life are undergoing modifications. Intermediate situations between full-time studies, employment and economic inactivity are becoming more common: combinations of study and work, internships and alternating training under work contracts are all examples of these growing "border" situations.

• along with monitoring work status following the different training programmes, it has become indispensable to **study the situation of beginners in the employment systems**, especially since the labour market appears to be increasingly closed to them. Which young people are recruited? How do employers decide between internal mobility, recruitment of an experienced employee and recruitment of a beginner? In a period of persistent unemployment, do employers favour the highest level of training proposed? In order to answer such questions, it must be possible to analyse the work itineraries of all the young people simultaneously, regardless of their original level of training. This then permits the comparison of labour-market entry conditions of young people coming from the same stream on different levels, such as, for example, those with BEPs, vocational *baccalauréats*, BTS, or DUTs in electronics. It is also possible to see which training streams lead to a particular activity sector or occupation--someone who wants to know, for example, how to become a computer engineer, will see that the requisite path is the university rather than the engineering school.

• **Institutional changes** have recently affected the scope of vocational training: the regions have been given new prerogatives in this area, and as a result, the sources of information about youth labour-market entry have been diversified. It is thus important to re-examine the surveys of Céreq's EVA observatory in the light of the other existing observation systems on the national or regional level.

For all of these reasons, the **demand for evaluation** is changing: during the 1970s and 1980s, the external evaluation of diplomas relative to the labour market was one of the EVA observatory's main objectives. Today, the multiplication of diplomas--all of them on the *baccalauréat* level or higher--, the emergence of complicated educational itineraries leading to a series of general and vocational diplomas, and the diversification of the ways of obtaining a given diploma--the classic academic path, apprenticeship, other forms of alternating training--make the study of the relationship between the diploma and the subsequent work itinerary more complicated. Thus, the demand for information is less concerned with diploma specialisations on a detailed level and more on the ways of obtaining this or these diploma(s) and/or the evaluation of the educational pathway rather than the final diploma.

New Options for Observing the School-to-Work Transition

Young People and Employers

Among the players involved in the school-to-work transition, Céreq has chosen to focus on the young people (with their ways of deciding between initial training and entry into active life) and the employers (with their recruitments). Training institutions, the intermediaries for labour-market entry, also play a considerable role in the structuring of itineraries for the school-to-work transition, but the behaviour of this kind of players is difficult to identify in direct relation to the advancement surveys.

The recent trend towards additional training after diplomas originally conceived as terminal and the increased frequency of renewed studies following an initial period of work experience encourage greater efforts to understand the trade-offs that young people make between studies and work. A follow-up sample group of young people of the same age, as well as in-depth surveys of

young people who have chosen **work or further education and training** after the same diploma may be relevant methods of investigation. There is a panel survey, conducted by the DEP (the Ministry of Education's Department of Evaluation and Prospective), which follows secondary-school students throughout the entire period of their schooling. In order to complement the information that this sample group provides about the academic orientation of young people, there is a proposal underway for Céreq to monitor the work itineraries of these same young people, also in a panel, at the end of their schooling.

A Unified Operation

In order to be able to analyse all the prospects of a training track (office automation or engineering, for example) for all the related diplomas (BEP, vocational *baccalauréat*, BTS, etc.), it is necessary to observe all the exits from training simultaneously. The same constraint presents itself for the study of the **recruitments** carried out by firms in a given activity sector or the entries into an occupation regardless of the initial training. The option selected is that of a survey analysing the paths four years after leaving school, regardless of the level.

Work Itineraries

Constituting standard work itineraries in the first years after training has been one of the main activities of the EVA observatory team over the past few years, along with elaborating standard indicators of labour-market entry. The prolongation of the school-to-work transition period and the desire to study the earliest job mobilities led to envisioning **longer-term experimental surveys** of nine to ten years. A pilot operation on 1983 *baccalauréat*-holders is presently under way.

Beyond the creation of standard itineraries representing modal paths after training, there is also the question of **interpreting these modal forms**. How do the young people's social origin, local enrollment, access to social networks that are more or less broad, and occupational programmes influence their subsequent paths? A better grasp of these questions implies expanding the present survey questionnaire, and this will be accomplished by setting up so called "**magnifying-glass**" operations.

Double Processing of Apprenticeship

The handling of apprenticeship in advancement surveys always poses a delicate problem. Apprenticeship is clearly a form of training leading to diplomas recognised by the educational system, but at the same time, it is also a specific kind of work contract. For this reason, apprenticeship is to undergo double processing at the time of the data-collection in order to study both its educational and work-contract aspects. According to the approach that it favoured, exits from apprenticeship can be counted among the exits from the educational system, as was the case with the previous group of surveys, but it may also be studied as a form of work itinerary following school-based training programmes.

Economic Cycle and Labour-Market Entry

Carrying out only one survey every four years creates problems for the interim period in the case of an economic reversal, since the last available results are difficult to extrapolate. Despite their rapidly increasing exit flows, no national survey of labour-market entry among higher education graduates is available except for those conducted by Céreq. It therefore seemed useful to have quick update surveys every two years, and a first experiment in this sense was conclusive. However, this kind of operation hardly resolves the question of the economic cycle's effect on the entry period, and this remains to be studied in greater depth.

School-to-Work Transition and Local Context

Studying regional differences in labour-market entry and meeting local information needs are genuine preoccupations, especially since the regions now play a key role in vocational training. However, the EVA observatory is essentially a national operation and because of the costs involved, the central survey can only generate a few regional aggregates. It is possible to imagine fairly developped forms of co-ordinating regional observation instruments with the national mechanism, where Céreq's regional centres would serve as interfaces between the central team and local players.

Changes in the EVA Survey System

The future system, which is more modular, is organised around a central survey carried out every four years. The information supplied will be less detailed in the analysis by training specialisation, but all the young people exiting will be queried on the same date. The polling rate chosen, 1/20, corresponds to the desire to obtain large regional aggregates and national results by training level or cycle and by area of training specialisation.

The calendar (see chart) for the 1995-1998 surveys can be broken down as follows:

- a single retrospective advancement survey after four years (1997) covers all the exits from the educational system, with a commun questionnaire and additional questions specific to the training level studied (polling rate envisioned: 1/20);

- a panel survey by telephone follows those young people benefitting from one of the public labour-market entry measures. From December 1995, the first panel is to be reconducted with a revised questionnaire contributing more information on the income of the young person and his or her family;

- the system is to be complemented by specific enquiries:

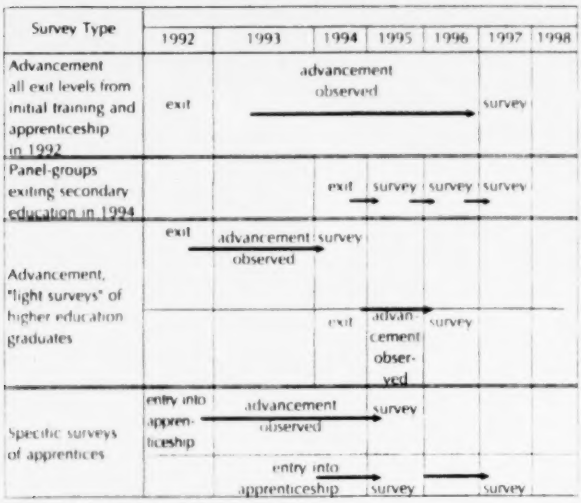
• surveys on specific training streams (e.g., those entering apprenticeship in 1992 and 1994)

• reduced-sample surveys of higher-education graduates

• longer-term surveys of sub-groups brought out by the analysis of the four-year retrospective survey.

- in the longer run, the whole will be accompanied by a new mechanism, complementing the DEP's student sample group and permitting the work activity or further education choices of a generation of young people entering secondary education the same year to be followed. This new instrument will be tested on a sub-group of the 1989 sample group and extended over the 1995 sample group.

Chart 1 - The School-to-Work Transition Observatory During the 1990s



Source: Céreq, EVA observatory

New Analytical Perspectives

The mechanism currently being set up allows difficult new angles of analysis to be integrated into the previous version by placing the emphasis on the employer and by simultaneously querying all of those exiting the educational system.

An Open-System of Observation

The study of beginner recruitments provides a good illustration: certain questions can only be addressed through several sources of information. The proportion of young people in overall recruitments can only be evaluated by drawing on overall sources on recruitments and companies, along with the EVA surveys.

In order to relate recruitment, continuing training offered to young people and employers' work-force management practices, detailed in-company surveys will probably be necessary. Likewise, non-statistical investigations--biographies, in-depth interviews over small samples--will complement the quantitative data of the open mechanism to be implemented.

Prospective Studies

An essential but complicated issue is the construction of scenarios for the changing conditions of youth labour-market entry taking into account the observations of the past through the advancement surveys, and of demographic, economic and regulatory changes. The simultaneous observation of all those exiting as well as panel data for several cohorts should facilitate this prospective study.

Development "à la carte"

The more flexible nature of the future mechanism's structure leaves a greater place for specific investigations between two central surveys: longer-term surveys, surveys on one training track, localised surveys.

Potential for Co-operation with Other Countries

The work already undertaken on the European surveys and the co-operation on the level of methods and problematics with the European Network on Labour-Market Entry reflect the desire for exchange and collaboration with foreign teams in the analysis of labour-market entry.

An Original Feature of the French Mechanism: Production of Research and Information

The DEVA team, which directs the national operation for the observation of the school-to-work transition, also produces analyses of labour-market entry that are partly based on its own data. As a public-service institution, Céreq places its data at the disposal of French and foreign researchers. In order to reconcile all these dimensions, it develops partnership activities on the national and international levels.

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